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A Midwives' Defence Union.

The most important question for midwives to consider at the present time is that of co-operation, for their present unorganised position is both a defenceless and dangerous one. The machinery has been established to define what they shall know, what they may or may not do, and what penalties may be inflicted upon them if they do not conform to the rules imposed upon them—rules which, be it noted, they have no voice in making, for their is no provision in the Midwives' Act of 1902 for the direct representation of Registered Midwives upon the Central Midwives' Board.

But though the machinery for the control of midwives is complete, there is none to which they themselves can turn for assistance, or through which they can organise their defence in case of need. They may even be summoned before the Central Midwives' Board, and have to defend their right to their professional existence, and, through lack of means, or of knowledge of the right procedure, may be unable to secure the legal defence which is of vital importance.

Let us say at once, we believe the Central Midwives' Board to be sincerely desirous of being "a terror" only "to the evil doers," and a "praise to them that do well." But those who have watched the proceedings at the disciplinary meetings of the Board cannot fail to have noticed how valuable a good defence is to the accused midwife, and how facts skilfully brought out in evidence may materially alter the aspect of the case against her. We believe that the Midwives' Board would desire that competent legal aid should be obtainable by every midwife.

We have given an extreme instance in supposing that a midwife may have to defend her professional existence. There are many other ways in which a Defence Union would be of great value to her. They are indicated in the suggestions which were made at the meeting held last week to consider the desirability of forming a Midwives' Defence Union. We consider the question of such importance that we have devoted the whole of our available space to it this week. The desire for the formation of such a Union amongst midwives is a most hopeful sign. We are glad to believe that the correspondence which has recently taken place in this Journal has given considerable stimulus to the movement.

Is a Defence Union Necessary?

By the courtesy of the Midwives' Institute, a meeting to discuss the desirability of forming a Midwives' Defence Union was held at 12, Buckingham Street, Strand, on Friday, February 15th.

The full room and the attentive audience proved the keen interest taken in the question. The chair was taken by Miss Wilson, President of the Institute, and amongst those present were Miss Rosalind Paget (the Treasurer), Miss Amy Hughes, Miss Davies (Matron of St. Mary's Hospital), and Miss Park (Matron of the General Lying In Hospital, York Road, Lambeth).

In briefly opening the subject of the evening, Miss Wilson said that for each year since 1900 the subject had been discussed at the Institute. At the annual meeting in January, 1907, it was agreed that the first discussion in the new year should be devoted to this subject. The Midwives of the Royal Maternity Charity had now formed themselves into a Defence Union, and it was a pleasure to the Institute to afford facilities on the discussion on the subject. She then invited Dr. Stanley Atkinson to take the chair.

Dr. Atkinson described the question of a Midwives' Defence Union as being now red hot. One great trouble in regard to the formation of such a Defence Union had been the lack of cohesion and co-operation amongst women, the lack of what he might term the Trades Union spirit. The Medical Profession had two powerful Defence Unions, and co-operation was the backbone of all such organisations. He advised all present to read a little book, "Women in Economics," by Mrs. Stetson, published by Putnams. If that did not teach them the importance of co-operation he thought nothing would. With the passing of the Midwives' Act, midwives had their rights. They should now combine to defend them. There was the question of individual defence, and of collective defence. Then there was advice—legal advice—which they often needed.

Collective defence involved defending the professional interests of midwives as a body. He did not think the time had come to undertake this duty to any great extent at present. He reminded those present that many of them had votes at local elections, that the London County Council was their Local Supervising Authority, and that they should let any canvasser in regard to the local elections, shortly to take place, understand that they appreciated this fact. They could also ask their Member of Parliament (many midwives, he was sorry to say, did not know who their local Member was) to approach the Privy Council in regard to the question of direct representation.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)